

## **Snapshots** by **emeraldhead-crimsonheart**

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**Summary:** A look into some missing moments of the pretentious creep and the suburban girl. Fluff, mild smut and angst. Season 2 and beyond.

## 1. Morning

**This will be a series of moments between my favourite Stranger Things couple.**

**This particular snippet is my take on a moment we'd all have loved to see from Series 2, Episode 6.**

**Disclaimer: I own nothing.**

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She woke up under the thin duvet, only wearing her knickers. She felt cold, remembering their warm bodies together as they'd fallen asleep. She blinked rapidly, suddenly fearful she had been left alone. Turning, she could see he was sat on the edge of the bed, head in his hands with his back to her.

"Jonathan?"

He turned at the sound of her voice, but not enough to make eye contact, "oh hey, you're up."

"What time is it?" she asked. Considering the house seemed quiet and still, it couldn't be that late.

"7:15." He said, still not looking at her.

He'd now chosen to stare resolutely towards the door she'd slammed shut last night. Before the room went dark and they didn't speak. It was just them and their hands and their moans and their hisses. She'd never experienced anything like that. Not even the first time. Like every sense was heightened.

"Are you ok?" she asked.

"Huh? Yeah, it's just," he combed a hand through his hair nervously.

"What is it?" she asked again, gaining no answers she sat up properly on the bed, shuffling closer to him, drawing the blankets up to her chest. A modesty reflex.

His eyes darted there rapidly, widening before they shot up to meet her gaze. He held it for a moment before he cast them down, looking ashamed.

"What is it, Jonathan?"

She had moaned his name last night.

Not in a million years did she think, on his first time he'd have been able to...well.... she'd guided him. He'd been an exceptional partner in that. Not too proud to ask for direction and yet she found he did things she'd never thought would arouse her. Fisting the hair at the base of her neck, trailing his fingertips down her arms so gently it left gooseflesh in their wake. His dark eyes had been so blown out with want she had been glad the room was poorly lit. Her whole body had felt flushed at that.

Jonathan shook his head absently, "it's stupid."

She raised an eyebrow, a movement he clearly caught in the corner of his eye. He shook his head again.

She wanted to reach out in that moment. But she needed him to say what he was thinking. She *really* wanted them to be on the same page.

"When I woke up I..." he paused looking behind her at the mess of sheets and her pajamas that had been thrown to the floor without a moments thought. "when I woke up you were sleeping with your back to me. And I just..." he seemed to struggle with the words for a moment. At this point in time she really wasn't sure where he was going.

He sighed, "last night was-"

"Unexpected." She said it softly, and she could have sworn she saw the edge of his mouth twitch.

"I dunno, I just....it was..."

*Amazing*, she thought. And that was the god honest truth. She fought a Demogorgon with this man and yet her heart raced faster as he'd

drawn her to him, his lips and hands so hungry she'd felt consumed by him.

"I know it was a vodka fuelled thing. But it was still....great." His shoulders sunk and she wondered if he knew just how lame that sounded. The fabric of his jumper tightened as he tensed, embarrassed. It sat taught across his back and she wondered briefly if she'd left scratches there. When he'd filled her, there were no words to describe it. She'd clawed at him as they no longer spoke, only moved against one another.

If sense had taught her anything about Jonathan Byers it was that he knew who he was. He was sure of himself. Of his actions. But not, it would seem when it came to her. She made the assumption then and there that he had been waiting for confirmation that this had just been a one-time thing.

He turned his head as she tilted hers towards him. She took the smallest of pities. Not because he needed it, but because *hell*, even now they'd slept together he still anticipated rejection.

She smiled at him as their eyes met. His such a dark, warm brown colour she found herself wishing she'd noticed this before now.

He didn't return her smile.

"Jonathan," she said his name again, only this time it came from the back of her throat. An echo of the sound she made when she came for him. Something in his expression shifts. She surmised he was biting down on his own tongue to stop from humming out his own sequel.

"You do know, you can't kiss a girl like that and not expect it to end up here," she said it with a slightly bemused tone to her voice. She watched his shoulders relax a little.

"So you don't... regret-"

"No." she cut him off, attempting to dismiss all his insecurities with this one word.

"Oh."

She would have been lying if she said she didn't know. That she couldn't tell what had been sitting there all this time. She'd just chosen not to acknowledge it. Bury it, along with her true self using Steve as a means of normality. The way Jonathan looked at her spoke volumes. His eyes brimming with an adoration she'd never experienced.

She noticed how close their faces were then. She wrapped her right arm around his waist, drawing their bodies together, tentatively. She heard the smallest intake of breath as he closed his eyes at the contact, resting his forehead against hers.

When he spoke, it surprised her. Although soft, it grated. Everywhere. Raspy and rough, just like his hands had been.

"I just thought you'd want to forget it," he breathed.

"I told you. I waited." She knew she sounded stubborn, but she really didn't care. Thankfully, his mouth curved up in a smile, though his eyes remained closed.

"If I'd known this would have been the outcome, I might have been ever so slightly more forthcoming."

She grinned at that. Taking in his mussed hair and freckles.

"Ever so slightly?" She knew she was pressing him, that he might not like the depth this conversation was sinking. Yet, she knew this was something that had to be discussed. Now felt like an appropriate time.

Jonathan shifted uncomfortably, "well....it's not exactly my forte. This." He reached out blindly, instinctively. Taking her hand and rubbing her knuckles with his thumb.

Nancy sighed, a contented noise she hoped he wouldn't miss. "Perhaps you should trust yourself a little more."

She knew she was speaking on both their behalves. And she assumed he knew exactly what she was referring to. He pulled back slowly as she did. Searching her face. One last time, with a concerned expression. It slowly morphed into something else. Something that

made her physically curl her toes beneath the duvet. It was the same look he'd had when she'd opened the door to find him merely a foot away. His proximity dizzying; electric.

She had a second to react, to wrap her other arm around his waist as he pressed his lips to hers again. The hunger was still evident, yet it was slower and probing. Explorative. His nails grazed a path through her hair causing her to elicit a moan into his mouth.

Pulling away he let out a rough breath. Still holding the back of her neck, their bodies flush again. The sheet had fallen revealing her bare chest. A few dark red patches were strewn around it. She couldn't help but grin at that too. The excitement that Jonathan Byers had done that was.... Intoxicating.

"You're amazing." He glanced from her naked torso up to her face. He appeared to be drinking in every inch of her with his eyes, as if still not believing she was real. "Beautiful."

She'd been called beautiful before. Never had she felt the flush of gratitude and... she didn't want to use that word yet. But it felt close. Frighteningly tangible.

They were barely an item yet. She now, after the fact, had to consciously remind herself of her previous denial of her feelings. She had quickly lost track of how many times their eyes had met across the classroom, or his way to the dark room or across the parking lot at school. How many times he'd been the one to turn away over the past year.

She needed to make him understand.

"Has anyone ever told you you're handsome?"

His brow furrowed and he scrunched up his face with distaste, "I don't think my mom counts."

She took his face in her hands, focusing on his gaze. Every look he gave her was intense. It made her hands shake slightly and she hoped he wouldn't notice.

"You are handsome, Jonathan. And wonderful. You didn't have to

come here with me. After the past year, you still came when I needed someone. Monster hunting. Conspiracy theorist interrogating and collaborating." She spotted him searching her face again, as if trying to catch her out. Probing for a lie amongst her words. She couldn't blame him after how long she'd been doing it before.

"This-" she motioned between them, "- this isn't always safe. And it's certainly not expected."

He snorted at that.

"Maybe Bauman got it right. Shared trauma, brings people together." The bitter hint in his voice was there, hidden beneath his usually soft tone. She didn't miss it.

"That's not the only reason," she pushed on because she had to make him understand. She'd lied to herself and to him for too long.

"You make me feel braver. You make me feel surer of myself. I don't second guess my choices when I'm with you. And I certainly don't feel like I'm pretending to be someone I'm not."

She could tell he was finally processing their situation. Revelling in the clarity he smiled his first genuine smile all morning. His teeth peeped out between his lips.

"That's not me, Nancy. That's all you."

A loud thud echoed from the floor above and they both grasped each other's arms in surprise. A defensive reflex. Both their gazes darted to the ceiling. Fear of monsters will do that to a person.

"Shit, I should go."

Although she didn't want him to, she agreed. "I don't think I could stand him saying "I told you so" with a shit eating grin on his face." She bit it out but there was no malice behind it.

Jonathan looked back down at her, his eyes almost sparkling in the half light.

"It was certainly the push I needed," he shrugged, though his smile

was still evident.

The movement upstairs signifying that their host was awake made Nancy both on edge and embarrassed. How easy had it been for an outsider looking in to tell there was something between them? Why had she denied it?

"I'm sorry." She blurted, letting go of him so he could fumble on the floor for his trousers. He pulled them on hurriedly.

"What for?" he asked curiously.

"For this happening the way it did. Us."

He looked at her beneath his fringe almost shyly, "I agree. All told it was a weird, crazy and unimaginable night. Yet it kind of fits with us."

She hummed in agreement, picking up her nightshirt and tugging it over her head. She gathered her bag for a shower that Bauman had pointed out before they had initially parted ways. They drew together in the middle of the room intuitively.

Her eyes flitted back to the ceiling as Bauman's bodiless raging cough sounded from above them.

"Just so you know," she said, taking his hand and giving it a gentle squeeze, "I'm tired of normal."

He nodded, his brow furrowing in such a way that reminded her of how he'd looked in his ecstasy the previous night. He squeezed back before releasing her and taking two strides to reach the door purposefully.

"You wanna ring your mom?"

"Later. Let's get ready to leave and head out."

"Sure."

He seemed to have his hand glued to the door for a moment. Watching her over his shoulder but not leaving. In a quick,

surprisingly fluid motion he came back to her in the centre of the room and kissed her like he had the previous night. If he was trying to convey his own feelings, Nancy thought her heart might melt then, on the spot.

He pulled away, breathing hard, "I just....yeah."

He threw her the smallest of smiles before he rushed out the door.

If she hadn't been listening for it, she wouldn't have heard the sliding door to the study open and close momentarily.

It took a minute for her to come to her senses. She could hear Bauman still coughing as he descended the stairs and make a beeline to the kitchen. He began whistling something from Flashdance and she could picture Jonathan rolling his eyes. It wasn't until then that she realised she was still smiling from ear to ear.

*Jonathan Byers*, she thought to herself, feeling a tidal wave of warmth crash over her at just the thought of him. *Them*.

*When did you fall in love with him?*

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**Authors note:**

**As a stand alone I'm actually really pleased with this.**

**I have literally fallen for all their adorable looks and glances, the evident chemistry and their obvious compatibility. My overall love of Stranger Things has also ignited in me a passion I didn't know I would feel again for a fandom. Big love to the Duffer Brothers in that sense.**

**Reviews always welcome.**

## 2. Drive

This is me trying to get into the mind of Jonathan Byers. Another snippet from 2x06. The car journey from Bauman's.

Also, as it turns out, me and Jonathan Byers are kindred spirits with regard to music taste.

The Duffer Brothers own.

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It had been another roller-coaster week in the fall. Similar and yet starkly different to the previous year's.

He'd been thrown together into situations with Nancy Wheeler in what could only be described as ineffable.

A year ago, he'd been satisfied being a loner. Working a part-time job to help his mum, hanging out with his younger brother. Delving deeply into music, films, photography and books, he had never felt a great need for companionship beyond this and his family.

He wasn't naïve. Of course, the bullying and the slurred "white trash" label had never been a help to him in social situations. It had stoked the fire of resentment of others from an early age. Why did he have to live to impress people? Why did he have to be the same as everyone else? Why couldn't he be who he wanted?

These thoughts had rarely been tested. Until the previous year.

He would never forget her coming to speak to him at the Hawkin's High School notice board. She had been the *only* person to speak to his face about it. Aside from teachers who were paid to take a minor hand in student's welfare. His only peer to acknowledge what a traumatic situation him and his mother must be in.

The time they spent together then had felt like a dream. Not necessarily a happy one, but something that should have been fictitious. Something he might have read in a novel once upon a time. And yet here she was. Back in his life, and in a matter of days had

convinced him that he had been right to make an exception in her back in 1983.

This didn't stop Jonathan feeling conflicted on the short walk to his car. A strained complex of embarrassment and anxiety caused him to fumble with the keys in the lock on the driver's side.

Having had to both endure eating breakfast during another horrifically perceptive Murray Bauman interaction and find out his mother and Will weren't home was enough to create a severely unsettling feeling that had been initially quashed by Nancy that morning.

He leaned over to unlock the passenger's side, throwing both their bags and the soda water parting gift onto the back seat. Putting the keys in the ignition, he dropped his hands to his lap for a moment. Trying to make sense of it all as Nancy got in the seat beside him, turning to fit the bottles into her bag.

Nancy.

He had never moaned a girl's name before. He had no doubt in his mind that Nancy had probably known that. But last night he had, repeatedly. In a ranged chorus from soft and breathy to gutturally primal. Perhaps he had repeated it too much. Each time he had said it, it reignited in him the belief that it was real, and not in fact a figment of his imagination and that he wouldn't wake up at any moment on the pull-out sofa.

The pull-out sofa. *The pull-out sofa.*

"I can't believe that guy," he said, before he could stop himself, rubbing his hands on his jeans. A nervous habit he barely knew he was doing.

Nancy turned to him. He followed suit with significantly less movement, almost looking out of the corner of his eye at her. His heart bounced in his chest as he saw the smirk playing at her mouth.

The smirk only grew as she took in his cautious expression, "he kind of had a point, y'know."

He cringed inwardly, but it must have shown on his face. Nancy pursed her lips and rolled her eyes a little. The smirk remained there throughout this action, and this caused his chest to tighten again. He thought back to the previous night again.

He hadn't really known what he was going to do. He hadn't really known why he had gone back there or what he might even say. And he certainly hadn't expected her to open the door before he even got a chance to knock as inconspicuously as he could.

That action alone had been a trigger somewhere. Thinking back on it, perhaps he shouldn't have been surprised that Nancy was also confronting the thing head on. Whatever the thing had been last night. That was how she had been moulded by her trauma; forging a headstrong character that had been buried beneath the expected conservative norms.

Jonathan also knew he hadn't been subtle. He had probably been wearing his heart in his eyes since the moment she had first spoken to him. The previous night hadn't been any different. She had opened the door to the guest room, still clad in that painfully short, pastel pink nightshirt. Her doe-like blue eyes, surprised and widened by his presence – encouragement enough for him to do something uncharacteristically bold.

Like a film reel, all their previous encounters had battered the inside of his eyelids at lightning speed. The dark room, the forest, her bed, his house, shared scars, her breathing out the words "I waited" as they stared at each other in cold opposing motel beds. Bauman's words echoed around his brain like a taunting mantra. *Shared trauma. Chemistry.*

And just like that he had made the most dangerous move of his life. He had kissed her. Unwittingly out of any external influence. He *really* wanted to fucking kiss her. Before Bauman, before the motel. *Christ*, if Steve hadn't interrupted them before the Demogorgon manifested in his living room, he might have had the courage to do it then.

At least now it wasn't so morally wrong with Steve out of the picture.

As she pulled away after merely a few seconds, he thought he had blown it. This friendship. This closeness he finally felt with someone; shattered into dust at something as facile as a kiss.

But then she was back. In his arms, kissing him as ferociously as he wanted to kiss her. He had to touch every fraction of her skin beneath his hands. He hadn't realised that he had needed this and he had needed her.

The first time she moaned into his mouth his brain had gone blank. She had actually made that sound at something he, Jonathan Byers had just done.

And then the door had closed. And he didn't have a fucking condom.

"Did he *really* have to twist the knife in deeper?" Jonathan asked, this question was intended to be rhetoric, but he knew Nancy would have an answer immediately.

"He was an instigator. Of course, he had to show-off about it."

Jonathan made a face.

"He definitely didn't have to be that crude about it. But I don't think your reaction helped." Her eyes were dancing with a slight mirth that made him grind his teeth together in annoyance. He rubbed his hands on his jeans again.

"I hadn't exactly planned on it happening," he said, defensively.

He hoped she knew what he meant. That he hadn't decided to bring condoms in his wallet for the first time in his life because he was going on a trip with his estranged friend Nancy Wheeler.

"Neither did I. Don't let what he said get to you, Jonathan. And don't forget what I said to you back there, I meant every word." She said, unwavering.

Still not entirely convinced, he struck up the engine and reversed out of the drive, not even thinking about putting on his stereo that was usually an ingrained force of habit.

After a few minutes on the road, he could sense Nancy idly glancing at him from time to time. She had been in his car enough, she must have noticed his pedantic routine fall by the wayside.

"Do you have any other tapes?" she asked conversationally, shuffling into a more comfortable position in her seat.

He worried his lip for a moment before answering, "check the glove compartment."

This request only built upon his anxiety. What if she didn't like anything he had in there? After routing through the extensive catalogue of mixes, Nancy picked something worn; one of his favourites. She brought it closer to her face, eyeing up the track listing he had scrawled on it.

"I've heard of Modern English," she said with a hint of disbelief. "Can we put this on?"

"Sure." He smiled at the road, overly aware at how fast his pulse had turned in this sweet moment of shared interest.

"What?" asked Nancy, as she eyed him with a mild look of suspicion.

"This is still a bit surreal."

"You or the bear trap?"

"Exactly. If someone had said... well... that I'd be driving back to Hawkins having attempted to close down a government research facility with Nancy Wheeler..."

"Me or the conspiracy theorist?" she asked warmly, her eyes dancing. That look made him catch a breath in his throat.

"You. Although, to be honest, I'm more excited by the fact you've heard of Modern English."

She turned to him fully, crossing her arms, "are you questioning my taste in music?"

"I question everyone's taste in music," he replied seriously.

Nancy narrowed her eyes at him a little, "this," she gestured at the speaker blaring out the raucous melody, "is much happier sounding than the Talking Heads."

Jonathan felt a knowing smirk creep onto his face. It wasn't a usual feeling he had around other people. One where he knew more than everyone else in his company. It was a look reserved for the dark room or a rare argument in the record store.

"It's actually a song about two people having sex before a nuclear attack." As soon as that word left his mouth he regretted saying it. He felt his neck burn against his collar and the smirk falter.

They had sex last night. His mind played through images. Her face suddenly shy as he had tentatively lifted her night shirt over her head. Her biting down on her lip so hard it almost tore the skin. Her eyes, wide with a need he didn't think her would ever see. Least of all on her, alone a room with him.

"How romantic," Nancy deadpanned. After a beat of silence, they both began to laugh lightly. "Here was me thinking the poppy synth was jovial and positive."

"I'm afraid not," he replied still grinning. For a short moment he wasn't worried about anything.

They continued to drive on winding roads, passing fields and forests. The mixtape receiving more comments and praise than he would have expected.

"Maybe you could show me some other stuff?" she suggested and he felt his heart swell. As the last notes on his current favourite The Smiths track finished, Nancy leaned forward and popped the tape out of the player. She brought it up to her eye level to examine it again.

"The label is so worn," she commented, squinting closer at the label.

Jonathan's throat felt suddenly dry, "there are two tracks left on that one I think." He said this feigning ignorance. But he knew exactly which two they were. It was a tape he had listened to a hundred times, he was surprised it still played.

The first track, especially after their most recent encounter, could be another reason for the ground to swallow him whole. The second was Bowie. She couldn't not like Bowie.

Nancy turned the cassette over a few times in her hand, "December 27th 1983."

A sudden horror dawned on him. He had originally made that tape for Nancy. Or at least with her in mind. Each song had been some sort of brooding commentary on their wayward adventures and whatever fantastical relationship had formed, however brief and fleeting.

Why they hell had he put Teenage Kicks on it, he really didn't know. Well he had. At the time he'd been listening to that song once a day, nearly detaching his headphones from the stereo he was dancing around so enthusiastically. There was a painful irony to the band being named The Undertones, and the implications of their song being anything but.

He really hoped she wouldn't see it. Her name. Written on the side of the tape in black marker.

Of course, he hadn't given it to her. It would have been like confessing to feelings he hadn't really understood himself. In twelve different musical arrangements, no less. He hadn't intentionally rubbed it off either. The repeated insert and eject from the player had seen it almost scrubbed blank again.

"Jonathan..." he clenched his jaw. He felt perturbed by the way she said his name. He tried to focus on the road and not his hands becoming clammy.

"Uhuh."

"Did you make this for me?"

He didn't answer. Instead he stared resolutely at the road ahead of him, feeling his face turning red. Biting down what pride he had left he replied.

"It was meant to say thank you for the camera, really. Then I realised

Steve also paid for it and ... I couldn't really give you a mixtape in that situation."

*That situation.*

"Is that why you never gave it to me?" as she probed, he felt his pulse quicken and his hands gripped harder on the leather wheel.

"Well I wasn't sure if we were even friends after. Although we always spoke when we saw each other at school. I didn't really know if you were just being polite." He confessed and he felt just as lame as when he had described their night together had been "great".

He knew he was avoiding the truth. He knew he really shouldn't. Enough had been spilled already.

"The lyrical implications are quite... explicit."

He took a hand off the wheel, wondering for a moment if she would laugh or whether she might demand him take her straight home. He pried the tape from her hand, jamming it into the cassette player and fast forwarding to track eleven.

When the first guitar of Teenage Kicks started playing, Nancy turned to look at him sharply.

He groaned, "I don't know what I was thinking."

Nancy seemed to be finding this amusing. He decided this was better than her getting angry and demanding to be taken home. He couldn't ask for more in this situation. What the hell had he even been thinking? The sad part was, it was only now he was considering the crass connotations. It was a bloody great song and at the time he had merely wanted to share it. As pathetically innocent as that sounded now.

"Well your intentions would have been obvious, if that had been the intention-"

"It honestly wasn't," he interrupted quickly, wanting to defend himself, "it's just a great song!"

"I know the Undertones as well." She said, looking at him. He gazed back at her with his mouth open a little in awe. Another exciting surprise from the suburban girl. "My uncle saw them play in Chicago back in the 70s. He said it was one of the best gigs he'd ever seen."

And then she laughed. A tinkling sound that reverberated around his head and ribs, fluttering along with the butterflies whose wings continuously beat around his chest around Nancy Wheeler.

She didn't say anything after that. Just air drummed a little. Jonathan found it harder and harder to concentrate as the song continued. To save face he didn't skip the track, even though he desperately wanted to.

The final track began and Nancy stopped her air drumming in favour of merely humming softly along, contented.

It was the same sound she had made as she laid her head on his chest. Once their limbs were exhausted, tangled up in the sheets. He felt briefly aroused by the sound, gripping the wheel tighter, his knuckles whitening. As her quiet lament continued, it fuzzed around his brain and he just had to look at her. He slowed down and pulled over. He had to kiss her again.

Right now.

She looked startled by the sudden stop, bracing her hands on the dashboard. As soon as he killed the engine he locked their gazes, yet he was taken aback to see her eyes were brimming with unshed tears and his heart broke a fraction at the sight.

"Nancy?"

It wasn't the first time he's been here; making sure she is ok. Affirming what they were doing was right. He'd done the same before he'd entered her. Although that had been more of a whimper. Both of them taking laboured breaths from lack of oxygen and their frantic, ardent kissing.

She bit her lip, "you chose this song."

It was definitely a statement. There was no inflection, Jonathan

noticed. So, he just sat there looking at her. Studying her face, trying to discern what had made her upset. He lifted a hand to wipe a tear with the pad of his thumb, cradling her face. She pressed closer into his palm, nuzzling there.

"Maybe I was being over dramatic," he said jokingly. It was a poor attempt to brighten her mood.

She looked up at him, the tears clinging to her eyelashes, but her stare was set. Confident.

"It's a beautiful song," she said. He had half expected her voice to shake, then he mentally berated himself immediately. He knew full well she was the stronger of the two of them. "I think it applies to all of us. Your mum, Will, Hopper, Eleven, Mike. Everyone."

He nodded. Having nothing else to elaborate with, he brought his face towards hers, angling it so there would be time for her to pull away if this wasn't a good time. Her breath hitched as their noses touched – another sound that stirred something primal in the root of his belly – it was enough. That was all the confirmation he needed.

He kissed her then as if he wouldn't see another day on this earth. Attempting to pour devotion into every touch and movement as his hands slid down her sides and gently caressed the skin beneath her jumper. Now he knew how Nancy Wheeler tasted, he knew he would rather starve than go without her again.

Inevitably, she pulled away for breath, a small giggle escaping her.

"How did you even learn to kiss like that?" It came out not unkindly, but Nancy flushed once she'd said it. A guilty look ghosted her face. The implication that he might not have been this intimate with anyone before (which wasn't strictly true) hanging there between them.

Jonathan considered a biting witty retort of "natural talent" but instead settled on something a little more modest, "intuition?" He shrugged, breaking her gaze. She smiled up at him, running a hand through his hair, pulling it out of his eyes.

"This is dangerous," she said, coyly.

"What?"

"Kissing me like that on a back road in your car."

Excitement of maybe a repeat of last night *in his car* was stunted by another car rushing by at break neck speed, bringing up his thoughts that had been set aside for his first car journey since... well... with Nancy.

He looked briefly back at the dashboard, the clock read past twelve already and it was a few more hours to drive home. His thoughts returned to Will and his mother, and the knot of trepidation he had tried to bury only grew. He felt himself frowning, an expression he couldn't shake once it had settled there.

When he turned back to her she already looked like she understood.

"You're worried because your mum didn't pick up?"

He nodded. Both severely impressed at how intuitive she was and how deeply connected he felt to her in that moment.

She really understood how important his family was to him. And that... that only solidified how he felt about her. How he... well... it was too early for that yet. He just hoped she might agree to go on a proper date with him.

*"we could be Heroes, just for one day."*

At some point in their roadside tryst, he had almost pulled her onto the driver's seat with him. She pulled away gently out of his grasp, settling back into the passenger's side and a huge part of him wished she hadn't.

As they set back off down the road, neither of them spoke again for a while. It was Nancy who eventually broke the companionable silence between the second and third tape.

"Can I expect a 1984 instalment, Jonathan?"

He was brought back to his senses at the sound of her voice, having been driving on autopilot. Unable to stop replaying in his head the way she had yielded against him and then turned them over to stare down at him defiantly on that spare bed. Those blue eyes were on him again, arranged with a stunning half smile he could never get tired of.

"I'll see what I can do," he muttered, unable to stop himself smiling back.

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**I bloody love writing these two.**

**Reviews are valued highly.**

**The next instalment will be filled with much more angst. I want to write a scene post-Will Exorcism/closing of the gate. Back at the Byers. A conversation that HAS to happen between Steve, Nancy and Jonathan. Maybe not even a conversation. Just some missing interaction. Jonathan isn't a bad guy. Neither is Steve. Neither is Nancy. They're teenagers who've saved a small town...twice. The idea that the three of them together have some reconciliation is really important to me.**

### 3. Aftermath

**WARNING - this is an ultra-angsty chapter. Apologies for those expecting fluff and smut. Unfortunately, I feel there was so much left untouched by the Duffer Bros I had to fill in a gap or two.**

**The next will be fluffy AF, I promise.**

**This is split into three sections all taking place the night that the gate is closed (2x09). NancyPOV/NancyPOV/StevePOV. I plead that you stick with it. This is still a Nancy/Jonathan centric fic, I just had some weird inspiration and thought it might be interesting.**

**Also rewatching the series – Joyce Byers is an amazing human being and I'll fight anyone who says otherwise.**

**Disclaimer: I own none of these characters.**

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The car was silent. The only sounds besides the rumble of the engine were the sharp, shallow breaths of Will in the back seat. His head sat in his mother's lap as she stroked his hair tenderly. Joyce was watching her youngest son so astutely, she was barely blinking. Cradling him in such a way it made him look much smaller than he was, so fragile he might break if she held him too tightly. Nancy couldn't watch.

Beside her, Jonathan's hands – usually steady – noticeably trembled on the wheel. He was leant forward, his shoulders hunched, his gaze barely on the road. Revolving in his seat every few moments to check his mother and brother were still there.

Nancy drew a long deep breath before releasing it as quietly as she could. It was the first lungful of air in some time that hadn't been punctured by the stench of sweat and dirt. It was cold. It clawed at her insides, frosting her airways, somehow waking up her dulled senses. Any sense of relief hadn't hit yet. She knew it wouldn't until everyone was back safe. The gate finally closed.

Jonathan had been, unequivocally spot on in his assumption that things would never be the same.

She remembered vividly being sat on his car bonnet in the bright November sunshine. The breeze had been crisp against her hands as they rolled around each other in her lap nervously. When he had said it, she was compelled in that moment to find the reconciliation she had been yearning, nearly pining for with Barb. She had considered back then that it might have been an exaggeration. That when the dust settled after exposing the lab for what they were, things could go back to normal.

How naïve she had been. Things would never go back. *Could* never go back. And Nancy didn't think she understood what normal even was anymore.

As Jonathan drove on, the pained anguish on his face was undeniable. She desperately wanted to reach out to him, to touch him, to comfort him from the ordeal he had faced. Her stomach lurched at the very thought of having to do what they just did to Mike.

That night she had found herself clutching onto Jonathan as his despair wracked him so hard his desperation to hide his face from his brothers tortured screams crumbled onto her shoulders. She felt like she couldn't hold him tightly enough. She cast a sidelong glance at him then, his profile striking in the moonlight.

"We're almost back," he said, hoarsely, catching her gazing at him.

As they pulled up to the Byers' House, Nancy felt her stomach drop. There were no lights on in the house, nothing to suggest there was any living soul held within the walls.

"Oh my god. Where are they? The kids? Steve?" she heard herself exclaim, a shake to her voice noticeable as her heart began to freefall in sheer panic.

"I don't know," said Jonathan, his own voice hollow as he glanced back at his family on the back seat.

Nancy rushed out of the car and into the house, turning on the lights to find it just as she had feared; empty. In a state of sustained shock, she grasped the nearest doorframe for support as her legs gave way. Where the *hell* were they? They were supposed to stay put.

Joyce and Jonathan carrying Will followed at her heel, both looking equally harassed as they took in the barren living room. Jonathan made a beeline towards Will's room at the rear of the house. She honestly didn't know where he found the strength.

At the sound of another engine approaching, Nancy bolted to the porch as a blaring set of headlights sped into view. The vehicle almost colliding with Jonathan's car as it came to an abrupt halt.

Jonathan appeared to manifest from thin air beside her, "is that that guy Billy's car?" They both held their ground as the headlights died and the kids spilled out from every door. Nancy found herself both stunned and impressed when the young redheaded girl, Max got out of the driver's side.

Her brother followed shortly after and she practically ran to him with renewed vigour in her legs at his appearance. For one horrific moment, she'd thought she'd lost him for good. She collided with him, bringing him into a bone crushing hug, something he returned willingly.

As she released her brother, Dustin struggled to stand upright next to them as he held up Steve whose face was battered and bloody. Again.

Before Nancy even had a chance to offer to help, Jonathan was by Steve's other side, pulling an arm around his shoulders and helping Dustin steer them haphazardly across the drive in the direction of the house.

"What the hell happened?" she heard Jonathan choke out, clearly carrying most of Steve's weight. The boy in question seemed to be in and out of consciousness, his head lolling around his own neck like a rag doll. She watched the group retreat, a small wave of relief accompanied a further sense of foreboding when she remembered Hopper and Eleven were yet to return.

Mike took her hand and squeezed it tightly, whispering so only she could hear, "she's not back yet, is she?"

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A multitude of limbs and hands and faces. The Byers home was full to the brim. Every sofa, every bed; occupied by a warrior who'd fought the Upside-Down. Except for Nancy.

She had watched, near helpless, as Hopper had been lumped with the unfortunate task of wrestling a delirious, semiconscious Steve into the last remaining bed. Jonathan's bed. She had shared a look with Jonathan as the chief had ploughed through the door and laid the struggling boy on the sheets. It was a look of mingled confusion and unease. Hopper clearly had no mind for teenage angst and was not about to set that aside for their own misgivings. Nancy reasoned that Steve could probably do with the bed more so than she did, having actually sustained injuries and still managed to guide the wayward younger members of the group to set fire to the underbelly of the Shadow Monster.

She couldn't help but be a little impressed. He really seemed to be growing up somehow. Although, it seemed that where once their lives had interwoven, they were beginning to run a parallel.

Her brother, Lucas, Dustin and Eleven had somehow managed to crush together onto the spare mattress. She hoped they were all sharing in a blissful dream. Away from danger, away from monsters, able to escape – even for an instant – from the adulthood that was roaring forth to meet them.

She tiptoed to Will's room at the end of the corridor. Edging it open as quietly as she could manage. Jonathan was sat in a chair beside Will's bed, holding the younger boy's hand. His head was laid on his own arm awkwardly as if he had lost consciousness without taking the time to get comfortable.

Nancy felt her heart ache and swell at the sight. She still found it terrifying how much she wanted to reach out to him. Yet something in the back of her mind kept stopping her. Was it the circumstance? Was it the house and the company? Was it a fear of rejection in the face of the recent injurious events?

She considered for a moment this notion. That after everything, Jonathan wouldn't want her around. That he couldn't spare a moment so that they could take solace in each other's embrace. It made her feel wretched. The thought of losing him from her everyday life all over again. After how far they had come.

She had learned – through unusual condition – how Jonathan had needed more time. How he hadn't been ready to dilute his attention from his recovering brother. This instance was likely to be just the same. The healing time even longer.

Her new-found resilience was a willing guide to her conclusion amongst all the madness. Nancy vowed to be there this time. So that he didn't have to bare the weight of it all on his shoulders. To support him. He had done the same for her after all. Agreeing to help her without a second thought, however reckless it might have been. It had been the catalyst that had brought them together, outside forces be damned. It would have happened eventually.

Having been with Jonathan, she didn't want to give him up. And she now knew what responsibility that came with. Watching his sleeping form, she recalled how soft his hair had been as she ran her fingers through it. How when his face as been merely inches from hers, she had revelled in the feeling of her skin flushed at his touch and at the look of intense reverence in his eyes.

She flinched at the gentlest of touches at her elbow.

"Are you alright, Nancy?" asked a concerned looking Joyce, having apparently awoken from her stupor on the second couch.

This pulled Nancy out of her reverie. She tilted her head towards the older woman, "I'm not too sure." She closed her eyes and tried to take a calming breath.

"Let's make some tea."

Nancy followed Joyce into the kitchen, watching her fill the kettle as she herself drew out a chair from the dining table and sat down. She let herself imagine what it would be like to have dinner here. She could envisage Will grinning, holding up some artwork for his mother

as Jonathan rushed to get a roll of film in his camera to take a few candid photographs. She found it strange that even through all the chaos, she found it easy to vision such a happy moment.

"Thank you, Nancy."

She started again at the other woman's voice. She bit her lip, "I'm not sure what you're thanking me for Mrs Byers."

Joyce looked at her wearily, a small smile coaxed out somehow, the edges of her eyes crinkling. "I think we're past 'Mrs Byers', don't you? Please call me Joyce."

Nancy could only nod as the kettle rumbled louder, she hastily looked over her shoulder to make sure it wasn't enough noise to wake anyone in the adjoining room. She didn't think she would have been able to sleep, even if she tried.

She found, as Joyce poured hot water into mugs that she was completely unable to formulate any sort of small talk. It seemed so trivial in light of everything. They settled instead into a palatable silence punctuated only by Nancy's murmured thanks for the tea.

As she dwelled on her current inability to converse, she was struck with how much she could talk with Barb and the other girls she knew. Gossip, movies, music for hours and hours. How much time had she wasted on such nonsense? This useless teenage chatter. These days she felt like less of a teenager than ever. She wondered vaguely if Jonathan had ever been able to live so carefree with no worries about his mum or brother. How he conducted himself and how much care he had for them, she doubted it.

Joyce pushed her black tea closer to her.

"You can talk to me Nancy. You looked like you had a lot on your mind back there." She smiled, sadly. It didn't seem to reach her eyes. "I'm not surprised after what you've been through."

Nancy contemplated this for a moment. She knew Joyce Byers was a kind woman. She had garnered this from what Mike had told her in the past of his play-dates at the Byers house. And yet, she now

understood where Jonathan got his good heart. His kindness. Joyce was somehow conversing so selflessly after everything she had been through. It was truly astounding to Nancy who seemed to harbour more frustration the more she contemplated the situation. What that lab had done and all the lives they had torn apart.

"I was supposed to get some milk a few days ago," said Joyce conversationally, gesturing at the dark tea in front of them. Nancy wondered if Joyce was trying to fill the quiet. To take her mind of things.

"Are you ok?" Nancy asked tentatively, feeling rather selfish that she hadn't thought to ask before now.

From beside her, Joyce took out a packet of cigarettes, patting down her pockets to find a lighter. "My boys are safe."

Nancy immediately thought of Bob. The woman before her had just witnessed her partner be mauled to death by a creature from another world. It made Nancy feel sick to her stomach.

"And Bob..." she said, as if sensing Nancy's trail of thought. Looking up from the table, she saw Joyce's eyes shining with tears. Instinctively she reached a hand across the table, wanting desperately to comfort her but not knowing exactly what was appropriate.

"But...my boys....my boys are safe," she repeated, a wild look of defiance brightening her eyes. "Did Jonathan ask you to come with us?"

Nancy retracted her hand stiffly, hiding it beneath the table in her lap. She knew she was skating around the inevitable as soon as she sat down at Joyce Byers kitchen table. It didn't mean that she was ready to talk about it. About Jonathan. After everything, and to his mother no less.

She hesitated, "no, Steve told me to go with you."

Joyce closed her eyes briefly, her brow disappearing beneath her fringe, before she fixed Nancy with a knowing look. "It wouldn't have been like Jonathan to ask. But we might not have succeeded without

you there. What you did was very brave."

She paused taking a long drag on her cigarette.

"I think you could be a good influence on him. Jonathan."

Something in her gut twisted, a satisfied little pleasure at the sound of such humble appraisal from Joyce.

"What do you mean?" she asked before she could stop herself.

"Well, Lonnie..." she began, shaking her head. It was Joyce's turn to stare down at her own cup, immersed it appeared, in memories of her ex husband.

"He told me a few things."

"Did he?" asked Joyce, appearing genuinely surprised.

"Something about shooting a rabbit," said Nancy ambiguously, not wanting to divulge the situation of how she became privy to that particular story.

Joyce laughed quietly for a moment. "I didn't think he'd remember that, it was so long ago."

"I think it upset him enough that it did."

"Perhaps I shouldn't have doubted that." The silence fell again between them. Nancy tried to take a sip of her scalding tea.

Joyce peered over her own cup, a curiosity in her eyes that made Nancy's stomach tightened, anxiously.

"Why would Steve have told you to go with us?"

This conversation had never been about to spiral into talk of college and midterms. Nancy had a feeling she knew where Joyce was directing them. She wanted to make sure Nancy Wheeler was not about to stamp all over her eldest son's heart. She'd nearly lost one to a monster, another real threat of heartbreak was not one, (it appeared) that even after everything, Joyce Byers could let go of so

easily.

"I'm not with Steve," Nancy started carefully, "Me and Jonathan..."

"He was with you yesterday?" Joyce interrupted, although Nancy was glad of it. She had no idea what to say to his mother about it.

Nancy nodded, rolling her tongue around her teeth to bide some time to consider how she was going to explain herself. *Truth will out*, she thought.

"We went with the intention of exposing Hawkins lab. We gave some valuable information to a private detective. I wanted some justice for Bard, my friend. For everyone. All those effected by their dangerous methods and cover ups. Jonathan came and helped me."

Joyce was quiet, watching her intently as she took another drag from her cigarette, the still air around them slowly filling with grey wisps of smoke. "Jonathan went with you?"

Nancy averted her eyes bashfully, suddenly feeling much younger than she had in months, "I asked him to."

Joyce smiled, raising her eyebrows, "huh."

"What?" asked Nancy a little confused that she wasn't being interrogated more thoroughly.

"He was never an outgoing kid. Maybe I should have known something was changing when he got arrested. Not that I was or still am today, happy about that."

Nancy shifted uncomfortably, the polite scrutiny Joyce was addressing her with was unnerving. She didn't know if it was intentional, or if she was reading too much into it in her own state of exhaustion.

"That wasn't..." *about me*. Suddenly disconcerted by her own musings she continued, "Steve was taunting him about his family, about you and Will and something just....snapped."

Joyce merely shook her head, the small smile appearing again.

"I hope what we did will help somehow."

This time, the woman before her reached out squeezing her shoulder in a confident grip. She beamed at her through shining eyes, "you've done more than enough. I want you to know that you're welcome here anytime."

At the sound of movement from the other room, both women looked around.

Jonathan was hovering outside Will's room, yawning. His eyes honed in on Nancy sat at his dining table taking tea with his mother. His brow knotted slightly; it must have been a peculiar site to witness while everyone else was sleeping.

"How is he?" asked Joyce, softly.

"Still sleeping, Mom, I-"

Joyce had already stubbed out her cigarette before he could finish, moving to her son and embracing him with wide arms and an even wider heart.

After a night of revelations it appeared Nancy had acquired a complete inability to take her eyes from Jonathan whenever he was in her vicinity. She desperately wanted to be alone with him. Jonathan opened his eyes over his mother's shoulder to survey Nancy again. She deterred her gaze into her tea, embarrassed to have been caught staring quite so openly. She swirled what was left in the cup for something to do with her hands.

When Joyce pulled away from her son she addressed the two of them, looking from one to the other. "You two should take a shower. It might help you sleep." As she crept into Will's room, Nancy could see even in the dim light of the hallway Jonathan's face go red at her remark.

She grinned wickedly, getting up from the table. Maybe they were on the same page after all. However risqué, she hoped he was at least thinking about sharing a shower with her.

His gaze flickered up cautiously to meet hers as she approached him.

"I can find you some clean clothes," he said, running a hand through his hair. He made a look of distaste at the feel of it.

Then she hugged him. Wrapping both arms around his shoulders and reaching onto the uttermost balls of her feet to draw him to her. Without a moment's hesitation he reciprocated, melting into her, his own arms finding her waist and gripping onto her tightly. His broad shoulders enveloping her.

She drew away suddenly, "*this* is where I want to be Jonathan."

His arm snaked up her back as she spoke, finding the back of her neck before resting there. His gaze was just as fervent as back at Bauman's, back in his car.

His voice cracked, "you don't have to Nancy. I get it. Everything just keeps getting messed up."

She bristled. Why couldn't he understand? She cared so much for him, she didn't want to be dismissed again.

"Jonathan, stop. I want to be here. I want to help. I'm here for you this time." She said this with such ferocious conviction, he looked taken aback for a moment.

He blinked a few times. It appeared, he had no other way of arguing against this. Instead he brought his face to hers, tilting her head slightly. Their lips searing together, heatedly. His hands cradled her face, so strongly it made her knees feel weak.

She assumed right there and then that he might finally have got the message.

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"Well this is fucking weird," said Steve, looking Jonathan up and down as he stood in the doorway. Jonathan's eyebrows knitted together and he hunched his shoulders. He looked uncomfortable to be stood in his own room.

"We ran out of beds," replied Jonathan, "and Hopper insisted you take one in case you had a concussion" he added, quietly. His eyes were focused on a spot above Steve's head, evidently it would seem, to

avoid his gaze. Steve felt suddenly very aware of how big he was for the bed he was laid in, an uncomfortable knot tightening in his stomach. He moved to sit up in the bed, wincing as his head throbbed painfully.

"Sorry," he said, struggling to lift his weight, his arms felt heavy on his frame. "I didn't mean to sound... ungrateful."

Jonathan looked at him directly for a moment, their gazes locking a little too long before he coughed and looked away awkwardly. He crossed his arms defensively over his chest, Steve watched the movement with interest. He remained stood there in the doorway, as if he wanted to say something but was struggling to voice whatever he was thinking.

At a loss of something to say, Steve having barely been conscious for a few minutes, spotted a mattress laid out on the floor of the hallway, some toes in off-white socks poking out beneath a duvet.

"How's the girl doing?" he asked.

"Eleven," Jonathan corrected. "Yeah, the kids are on a spare mattress in the living room and Hopper took the couch."

The silence fell again instantly, it felt stifling in such a small room. Steve wasn't sure if it actually was the room, or if it was Jonathan Byers' inability to say what he wanted that was making him so uncomfortable. There was an unbridled tension in the way his back arched a concave shape in on himself.

He had sent her with him. Looking after the kids had put some perspective on things. How selfless he had felt in that moment. He knew it had been the right thing to do. Jonathan had needed her much more than he had in that time. It had given him some small satisfaction against the aching, piercing pain in his heart as he'd watched Nancy and the Byers drive off into the night. It left him wondering how he hadn't seen this coming.

Steve toyed with the idea of asking how she, Nancy, was. However, Jonathan got there first.

"Nancy is making some tea if you want some?"

That isn't what he had been expecting. He nodded, "sure. Thanks."

Jonathan, it appeared was becoming flightier the longer he stood there. His eyes flitting from his own bedroom walls to Steve laid in his bed. In a way Steve couldn't blame him. This was too fucking weird.

This unfortunately for Steve lead him onto wondering if Nancy had ever been in Jonathan's bed before. That thought made his head pound a relentless heavy drum against his skull.

It was out of his mouth before he could stop himself, no thought for pretence, no thought for subtlety. Definitely no thought for that had transpired over the rest of the night.

"Do you love her?" It was fractured, and his voice cracked as he said it. Steve thought he must have sounded desperately pathetic but he forced himself to look at Jonathan with the strongest intent.

The other boy looked alarmed by the question, whipping his head over his shoulder before stepping into the room cautiously and closing the door behind him. He took a step closer to the bed. Steve tried hard not to swallow noisily at this advancement. Jonathan Byers could throw a punch almost as good as Billy Hargrove.

He didn't know what he anticipated. That the other boy would confess his undying love for the same woman that he, Steve Harrington, also felt so strongly for. He certainly didn't expect him to sit down in the chair next to the bed and remain behind the veil of resolute silence. Steve danced vaguely with the idea that perhaps he was no longer capable of speech at all.

At his closer proximity, he could smell soap and clean clothes and his gut twisted with envy. He could still feel the dirt between his fingers and the hard crust of a t-shirt worn too long on his back. Jonathan's gaze stared fixedly at the floor by the bed. Steve was becoming agitated by this vocal ineptitude, frustrated because he wanted Jonathan to admit it. He'd sent her with him for crying out loud. He knew where he stood and it wasn't *between* Jonathan and Nancy

anymore.

"I hadn't planned on it," muttered Jonathan to the carpet, running a hand through his hair. Steve was hard-pushed to think he wasn't merely talking to himself. Jonathan picked up a book from the table beside him, absently flicking slowly through the pages.

Steve almost scoffed. In his opinion it was nigh on impossible not to fall in love with Nancy Wheeler if you spent enough time with her. A noncommittal noise escaped him and Jonathan had the good grace to send him a cursory look of displeasure.

*Good.* Steve thought, *this should be as uncomfortable for me as it is for you.*

"I don't like people very much, Steve." Jonathan turned the book over lazily as if reading the blurb on the back.

Steve contemplated this for a moment, shuffling further onto the pillows. He could recall joining in with the teasing of Jonathan in middle school, breaking his camera without a second thought, pushing him over the edge into a physical retaliation.

Jonathan sighed in defeat, running a hand through his hair in an identical motion. The clean scent drifted through the air again, "I didn't like her at first."

"Then why did you take her picture, Byers?" He bit it out, bile rising in his throat. The anger finally starting to lick at his insides as the boy sat beside his bed remained forcibly distant. He would have raised his voice had the house not been so quiet, the sky outside not still black.

Jonathan discarded the book back from which it came, rubbing his hands on his jeans and then at his eyes. It was then Steve realised just how exhausted Jonathan looked. If he wasn't already riding on a hot wave of anger he might have spared a sympathy or two.

"I have trust issues, apparently. Yet, I found it quite easy to get along with Nancy. To trust her without much second thought."

"That doesn't explain why-" Steve began but Jonathan continued on.

"I hadn't really been around many people save for my family. It made me realise there were people out there who could show a little compassion."

Steve looked at him incredulously.

"I never said this was ok," Jonathan supplied, clearly noticing the bewildered look on Steve's face.

"Why are you telling me this?" he asked, partially curious and generally underwhelmed by his genuine and honest answer. The fiery rage had been dowsed as Steve realised that this was most likely the truth. That Jonathan wasn't trying to deceive him. He had legitimately found a friend in Nancy over the loss of his brother, a connection that Steve was slowly beginning to recognise as something which might have felt unnerving yet comforting for someone who was used to being alone.

Jonathan shrugged, his shoulders sagging even further, his eyes dazed and unfocused from lack of sleep, "I didn't mean for this to happen. I hadn't planned it."

"But it has." Said Steve, resigned to the fact. He didn't have to be happy about it, though. "She's with you now."

At his silent resurgence, Steve made a swift motion so he was at eye level with Jonathan from the bed. Fixing him with a pointed look.

"Are you telling me you guys aren't a thing?" he challenged.

"I dunno, I-"

"Then *what?*"

"I just had to exorcise my brother, Steve." Jonathan's dark eyes flashed in his direction, a renewed confidence emanating from his hard gaze. "I came in here to make sure you were still breathing and bloody apologise for any misunderstandings." His gaze faltered almost immediately as he spoke the words and his shoulders bent again. He shook his head, his hair falling in his eyes, "I don't think either of us quite know what we are yet. There's been a lot going on."

"What's not to understand?" asked Steve. He wanted to be angry, but his brain had honed on to a singular word Jonathan had just used; exorcise.

His eyes looked haunted, no doubt burdened with whatever he had experienced out in the chief's cabin. It gave him the appearance of having aged ten years. Steve was overcome in that moment by just how grown up Jonathan was. It came crashing down around his ears as he sat back against the pillow. He wasn't there to argue. He was there to resolve whatever had gone on between the three of them. Being the bigger man. Stepping up.

"This week we've all seen some serious shit. Stuff that no one would believe without seeing. We met this conspiracy theorist yesterday. He said something about the general public wanting to stay guarded from what's really happening. That most people won't pry open the curtain and actually see what's really going on. They're happy to live in a state of complete ignorance and not question anything."

It was Steve's turn to stay silent. Jonathan appeared to have found some strength and didn't seem close to burning out anytime soon.

"I had nightmares for weeks after Will came home. I imagine I'll have them ten times worse after tonight. What we've all been through, my mum, Eleven, Will, you and the boys, we're going to have to get through this. That's how it all works right? We have to get up and pretend like everything is fine. Go do our jobs, go to school. Fit in with everyone else. But nothing is normal. I don't even know if we'll ever see normal again."

He rubbed his hands on his jeans again. "You need to know you're not alone." Jonathan's gaze flickered up to meet his again, "Nancy is really worried about you."

Steve couldn't fathom how there was no bitterness in his tone at all as he said this.

He stifled a small laugh, "Jeez, Jonathan. I think that's the most I've ever heard you speak-"

There was a dainty knock at the door causing Steve's heart to leap

into his mouth. Both himself and Jonathan turned sharply as the door opened and Nancy stood there with a steaming mug of tea in her hand. Her stunned expression suggested she hadn't known Jonathan was in here with him. Least of all having an amicable, yet really fucking weird conversation about the events recently transpired. She started, appearing to realise they were both watching her expectantly. She blinked quickly between the two of them.

"I uh... I brought you some tea," she said unnecessarily. She moved to the opposite side of the bed to Jonathan, placing the mug beside him. Steve noticed Jonathan's gaze follow her movement across the room, his expression remaining neutral as she sat gingerly on the edge of the bed.

She glanced at Jonathan briefly before addressing Steve, "I wanted to say-"

"Nance, you don't have to." Steve interrupted as Nancy's eyes widened at the interruption. "Your boy Jonathan just did an..." he stopped himself, not wanting to give the impression that his brain wasn't still struggling to process all the information and that he was cool - by any stretch of the imagination - with the two of them. He really wasn't. "He did an alright job of explaining things."

Nancy cocked her head towards Jonathan, apparently unaware of Steve also watching her. Christ, she was beautiful. Even if the sweater she was wearing was most definitely Jonathan's, the turn of his stomach didn't stop him gazing at her like he always did. Unable to look away, captured by her presence.

And yet, Steve could only look on helplessly as her gaze softened and something shifted in her shoulders. Jonathan returned a small, modest smile. It was a crooked thing, almost as if he was rusty and out of practice doing it. Steve was suddenly hyper aware that until then, he couldn't remember seeing him ever smile before that.

Steve *also* found himself wishing he wasn't here for this rather intimate look they were sharing. It had been a long time, he realised, since she had looked at him like that.

When she did look back at him, her eyes were still soft, but there was

something not wholly there. To him, it was as if all the pieces hadn't been put back together right. At her questioning look Steve spoke kindly. "we're ok." Although, he'd have a hard time convincing himself of that later.

"Are you sure you're ok?"

"I told you I was a shitty boyfriend-" Jonathan shifted uncomfortably from the chair by the bed.

"I meant physically," corrected Nancy, sounding slightly impatient. "How is your head?"

He instinctively lifted a hand up to the back of his head, wincing for effect (although it wasn't entirely unwarranted), "I've been better."

"Your hair has looked better," came Jonathan's voice, barely a murmur.

Steve found himself laughing in response. Amongst it all, Jonathan Byers had found some sass. He shook his head through his laugh. "This is so fucking weird."

"I know." Nancy looked shy all of a sudden before reaching out and squeezing his hand lightly and retracting it just as quickly. The feeling of her hand on his was like a jump start to his brain. While his heart began to race at their modest contact, Jonathan looked entirely nonplussed by Nancy's action and Steve felt another wave of nausea. How the fuck was this guy so ... understanding?

Steve considered not asking, but the seed of curiosity had been planted firmly in the back of his mind, "you had to exorcise your brother? That sounds-"

"Horrendous," breathed out Nancy.

"I'm not sure what was worse. Trying to fight a Demogorgon or hearing Will scream like that." Jonathan's voice sounded hollow and empty. He sounded drained of all substance. A shell of a person as he spoke of the atrocity he had just had to endure.

Nancy looked like she might move to him, but was aware of Steve's

eyes still trained on her. It was selfish, he knew, that he was glad she wasn't comforting Jonathan so freely in front of him. Showing him how blatant their connection was now he finally had some clarity on the whole situation.

"Oh shit. Don't go in the fridge," he said suddenly, an image of the Demodog's body wrapped in a sheet flashed in his mind.

Jonathan turned to him perplexed, "What? Why?"

Steve clenched his teeth, making a face.

"I was a bit out of it. Dustin asked me to lift that Demodog-thing into the fridge. He said something about investigating it's DNA or biology or something."

"What?" cried Nancy, jumping to her feet, ready for battle again.

"I was a bit delirious," he confessed, feeling a little ashamed he had just done what the younger boy had asked him to without question, "being knocked a round or two will do that," he said sheepishly at Nancy's death glare.

Nancy shook her head, finding Jonathan's gaze. "We should get it out of the house."

After all this, she still went to him for help.

Jonathan nodded and in a second she was gone, out the door, leaving them alone again.

"Maybe you're right," Steve began, unable to keep the thought to himself, "I'm not in any way ready to be friends, Byers."

Jonathan looked at him, his brow furrowed again. "I never said that."

Realising he probably had to elaborate, he added hastily, "If I dunno... weird shit starts happening again. I can help."

A look of understanding passed over Jonathan's face, as he ran another hand through his hair. "Thanks."

"I hope your brother is alright, man."

"So do I."

Steve had no concept of what time it was. All he knew was that particular conversation had knocked him another two rounds. His whole body relaxed into the sheets as he was left alone again. He hadn't realised his whole body had tensed, on high alert as he had been joined by the two of them.

He still felt horribly out of place in Jonathan's room. In Jonathan's bed. Yet his face hurt and his arms hurt and his head was still pummelling his skull if he moved it too quickly. Altogether this made him care slightly less as he eased his eyes closed again.

Steve had never loved another girl before. Sure, he'd had sex with quite a few but he'd never loved them like he had loved Nancy Wheeler. He now felt certain he had a better understanding of what all those horrible mournful pop songs about breaking up were talking about.

He wanted to hate Jonathan. He found that as hard as he tried, he just couldn't bring himself to. The guy had almost lost his brother for the second time in a year. If anything, he deserved Steve's uttermost condolences. His thoughts of Nancy were the only things getting in the way of him achieving that state of selflessness.

He knew Jonathan hadn't tried to worm his way between them after their argument at the Halloween party. Steve knew he himself had been an ass for stalking off, yet Jonathan hadn't taken a single advantage of their feud that night. He'd lied to her to keep her and Steve's charade going for both of them to see the final curtain call. He had made no attempt to get between them. He had just been looking after a friend in need. Jonathan was so painfully honest that Steve wondered if he could ever really measure up to that.

The memory of them stood back to back in the room a wall away resurfaced. A thousand fairy lights suspended above their heads, a crude alphabet daubed on the walls. It had been like the whole world had stood frozen. Jonathan Byers and Nancy Wheeler, each armed and ready to fight off a creature of unknown strength and of

unpredictable apparition, set determination mirrored in the others face.

Perhaps the wheels had been set in motion then, he reasoned on the brink of sleep. A kindredness he could never share in, somehow found between the two of them. Forged in unfathomable circumstances.

He still didn't have to be ok with it.

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**This was a lot in the making. Each part is kind of linked to the next and I hope that comes across quite nicely.**

**I thoroughly enjoyed writing a different POV for them as well.**

**Reviews are ALWAYS welcome. The good, the bad and the ugly.**

**I'll be writing the next one on either Jonathan and Nancy's first real date, or how they navigate through being a couple at school and what leads them up to being open about it to their peers. Either way it'll be a Jonathan POV.**

**Also, thank you to everyone who has thus far favouredited, followed and reviewed - you guys are freaking awesome.**

## 4. Mix-tape

**Author note:** The demand for Jancy content generally has me slightly overwhelmed. I've never received actual requests before for story continuation. (So, like, no pressure, or whatever).

**This was intended to be one half of a whole chapter, but I just can't get the second part right just yet. And I refuse to publish work I'm not happy with. You've been warned.**

**Disclaimer - Duffer Brothers own.**

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The house was a huge chasm of quiet in the early morning. With Will still sleeping and his mother already forced back into work it was deathly quiet, save for his footfall on the wooden floors as he moved about the house.

Jonathan knew it couldn't have been easy for his mother. To leave her sons outlandishly soon after what had happened. Yet as the dust settled, as he calmed down from his initially desperate reasoning to keep his mother at home with them, he recalled his own words.

People would expect them to be normal. The general populous of the town had no clue what had transpired. Perhaps it was safer if it stayed that way.

This didn't stop him detesting the silence. The only peace he ever truly enjoyed was in the dark room. The faint buzzing of the red lamps, his concentration and focus usually enough to fill his own head. Now however, if he let his guard drop in his home – once a safe sanctuary- sounds echoed from raw memories: wails of despair, white heat bubbling and blistering his eardrums. It was driving him crazy.

He needed a distraction. Evidently, his subconscious was on another vein entirely, as Nancy's face immediately swam in his vision at the thought. That alone caused a guilt to set in his bones. He had been trying (and failing) to focus his attention on Will while he had been at home. This was already proving difficult as Will was still unconscious for large portions of the day, allowing Jonathan's mind

to wander to mussed brown hair and big blue eyes.

An internal conflict was waging a cruel war inside him. On one hand, he wanted to aid his little brother's recovery in any way he could. He was still disappointed in himself that he hadn't been there when the dwindling embers of his brother's character had still remained before the monster had engulfed him completely. That was enough for Jonathan. His absence of care was not going to happen again.

And yet, on the other hand – the hand that held a year-old scar – there was Nancy Wheeler. The girl that he just couldn't get out of his head. It had been two days since he'd seen her, spoken to her, kissed her. He already missed the warmth of her eyes on him, her sharp tongue and her comforting presence. The ease with which she acted around him had a calming effect nothing else seemed to be able to replicate now. This time round everything was different. This time round the feelings stirring inside him were warranted. Justifiable.

With his familial and romantic intentions vying for his attention, Jonathan eventually settled on making the mixtape he had promised Nancy while keeping a watchful eye on his sleeping brother. He was content accepting his own compromise; it was a welcome distraction.

It meant the silence was filled. It's heavy weight erased by a soothing melody or a brash, foot stomping riff.

His music collection was stored, unordered, in half a dozen shoe boxes. He carried them and the RX-5090 into the living room, pulling the coffee table so he had a view of Will's room from his work space. Burying himself in his extensive music collection, he'd somehow made two and a half new tapes by lunchtime.

Having shut off the boombox, he went to check on his brother. He'd tried to keep the volume as low as possible, but the tunes had clearly reached his younger brothers ears. He turned over when Jonathan walked into the room, his face showing more colour than it had the previous day.

"Hey Will, how're you feeling?" Jonathan asked, perching himself on the end of the bed.

Will rubbed at his eyes. "Tired," he croaked, glancing out at the table covered in cassettes. "Is that a new mix you've been making?"

"Yeah, sorry bud. Was it too loud?" Jonathan asked, suddenly concerned he hadn't been as considerate as he had intended.

"No..." Will pushed himself up in bed, "...I was liking it. It was nice to wake up to." He smiled feebly.

"Are you hungry?"

"Yeah."

"Pretty sure mom said that was a sign of recovery. Is soup ok?"

Will nodded wearily. "That mix," his brother glanced at the pile of tapes again, his eyes out of focus, "it sounds a bit, I dunno. Different."

Jonathan blinked before frowning. He didn't think he had added anything out of the ordinary. Blondie, New Order, maybe the Elvis Costello was a little off-piste for his usual compilation but it fitted with the upbeat tone he'd been trying to achieve.

"Erm," he ran a hand through his hair, ruffling it at the back, "it's for Nancy actually."

He chanced a glance at his brother to see Will's eyes, although deepened with dark circles, were wide with surprise. "How long have I been out?"

The joke filled the air between them. While initially taken aback by Will's ability to rib him after being – almost literally – dead to the world only a few hours before, Jonathan found himself grinning, a small chuckle escaping him. He shook his head at his brother's cheek.

"*Actually*, she asked. And she helped. I wanted to say thanks." He quipped back.

"Are you guys together?" Will inquired cautiously. "Is that why she came to the cabin?" His gaze brightening with curiosity as he questioned further.

As much as Jonathan would usually indulge his brother with such things, it was still all new to him. He wasn't entirely sure of how it all worked. How it all fitted together. What the next step might be. He was completely ignorant about what he was doing. The word 'girlfriend' itself remained a loaded one. The mixtape was a low-risk starting point.

"Yeah. Sort of, maybe. I'll make that soup," grateful he'd recalled the edible distraction he made an escape so he could collect himself.

As he heated the soup on the stove his thoughts strayed lazily back to her. Something he was making a habit of.

He thought about the first time he'd properly looked at her. Not through a lens but lying next to her. He remembered the night with such pristine clarity. He'd had to force himself to breath quieter, it had sounded far too loud in his ears alongside her own delicate breaths.

Even in profile she had been more beautiful than any woman he'd ever seen up close. He'd fallen asleep with his eyes on her, knowing he shouldn't but knowing he could. The circumstances had allowed it, as if he was watching over her. (Not that she needed it of course). He hadn't even tried to hide his gaze as it levelled on her form, the duvet pulled under her chin, her face tired but defiant as if she could take on any monster she wanted. Her strength was something he couldn't help but revere in that moment and continued to do so.

Perhaps he had fallen in love with her that night. He would never be sure.

His brother ate his soup and fell asleep shortly afterwards. This left Jonathan to finish the third tape and perfect a fourth.

The fourth was the kicker.

He pushed it into the tape deck for the second time. Laying out on the sofa with his hands behind his head. The tape playing like a hushed lullaby.

*"We only seem to hang out when the world's about to end."*

That wasn't an accurate representation of *them* was it? They'd battled monsters, they'd took down a government organisation, they'd been captured and they'd fought back. Every time. And yet he didn't know that much about her when he really thought about it. Her favourite colour, where she liked to eat, where and what even she wanted to do after school. (Unlike him whose ambitions were usually displayed around his neck for the world to see).

Jonathan felt he could loosely deduce Nancy's Wheelers favourite season was winter – someone couldn't own such a broad selection of jumpers and not love the reliable seasonal excuse to wear them. He imagined her liking hot cocoa and a burning log fire.

His eyelids drooped and he allowed himself to indulge in the image of the two of them together in his living room. Cuddled up together under a blanket, warming mugs of something spiced and chocolaty curled in their hands. He could picture her sapphire eyes bright, reflecting a burning flame in the grate.

He abruptly sat upright.

Did he really have to imagine these things? The vividly painted picture in his mind faded like smoke and his heart sank at the site of the empty darkening room. He felt cold.

Jonathan – the knot of guilt tightening one again in the pit of his stomach – strode across the room to peak in at his brother before affirming his decision. If Will had been awake, a brotherly distraction amongst the mental detritus that had built in festering layers, he wouldn't have gone. Waited until he was properly well again. His reasoning held little water, he knew that. But he was starting to feel like an obsessive. All his thoughts on Nancy as his insecurities started falling away. A new credence taking root.

*"this is where I want to be Jonathan."*

He would go and see her. Because he wanted to. And because maybe it was ok to yield to social normativity. Even if it was only for a few hours. He didn't have to imagine. He could bloody well ask her himself. This wasn't going to pass. Thinking and dwelling and envisioning things about her. He *wanted* to know. He wanted to know

the right answers.

His mum arrived home at 6pm – later than planned. Jonathan had dressed in a nice shirt, he'd combed his hair. All in all, he felt like a bit of an idiot when she stalled in the hall to look him up and down.

"Are you heading out?" she asked, tossing her keys onto the side. He wilted under her probing gaze, folding his arms over his chest. He was gifted a beat to compose himself as his mother checked in on her youngest son.

"I was going to pop by the Wheelers," he said, knowing his mother would see right through him.

Joyce notably relaxed upon seeing Will sleeping, retracted her head from the door, closing it noiselessly. She turned to address Jonathan, "have you spoken to her since she left?"

Jonathan shook his head. He avoided his mothers gaze again, feeling foolish for asking, wondering if she would think him selfish for leaving in lieu of everything that had happened. "It's more to check on her than anything."

He loved his mother. He had the uttermost respect for his mother. He was not however, about to admit he was perturbed he was starting to harbour such intense feelings for Nancy. All he knew was he had to see her, check that the nightmares and horrors weren't also haunting her solitude as they were his.

"When will you be home?"

"Not too late if I'm back at school tomorrow. And..."*in case anything happens.*

They shared a look of understanding. The words weren't necessary. It was far too early to dismiss another potential threat. That alone was only adding to his sleepless nights. His mother pulled him into a one-armed hug, her other still resting on the doorknob to Will's room.

His mother lingered, her grip tightening. He could feel her shaking. Pulling his face away he could see the silent tears in her eyes. "Mom, I can stay-"

"No. No no. You should go, honey," she murmured wiping her eyes. He felt a pang in his chest and he recoiled, placing both hands on his mother's shoulders.

"Mom, I can stay. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have considered leaving. Not this soon-"

Her eyes snapped up to meet his "- there has been enough *bad*, Jonathan. If you want to go and see her that's a *good* thing," she said, the familiar conviction soaking her words. "We'll be fine here."

He thought her assurance was misplaced. How did she know that? How could she be sure they would be ok?

"I can't leave you-"

"Yes you can," his mother's voice rising every so slightly. She steered them towards the front door, Jonathan's protests against leaving were ignored. "Will seeing her make you happy? Would seeing her take your mind off things?"

The internal self-condemnation at wanting to be anywhere but in his home reared its ugly head again. His body betrayed him. He nodded.

His mother appeared to be fighting off a smile, "well then, take her out for something to eat." She stuffed a five-dollar bill into his jacket pocket before handing it to him.

Jonathan's prolonged hesitation to take the garment from her was met with a softened look, "be home by ten, ok? If you want to go, you should go. Everyone has been through enough. It will cheer you up."

"If you're sure-"

"I'm sure."

Almost convinced he was doing the right thing, he headed out to his car, checking his pockets. Keys, wallet, mix-tape.

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When he pulled up outside the Wheeler's house he turned off the cassette he'd been blaring – a crude attempt at a confidence boost. He

rubbed his hands on his jeans and killed the engine.

He considered for a moment if Nancy looked out the window and saw his car that she might come out on her own volition. He huffed. That isn't why he'd got in his car. The final push had been the chance of the surprise on her face when she saw him. Those ocean eyes wide and bewildered. Just like that first night.

Karen Wheeler answered the door.

"Oh." She said, her hair set in huge curlers on top of her head, "hi Jonathan. How are you?"

"Hey Mrs Wheeler, I'm doing well thank you."

"And your mom? How is she? And Will? Mike said something about an awful fever?" she questioned. Jonathan tried to keep his face impassive upon hearing Mike's blatant, yet morbidly believable lie.

He tucked his hands deeper into his pockets, "they're doing much better thank you Mrs Wheeler." He faltered for a moment before adding, "is Nancy in?"

Karen Wheeler's eyebrows rose a fraction in surprise. He gripped the mixtape in his jacket tighter. Pushing it deeper into his pocket, feeling a vague scrutiny under her gaze. "Is she home?" He pushed, attempting to sound as polite as possible.

Her face broke into a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. "She's just upstairs. Is this another-" she looked him up and down with much more intent than his mother had done "- school project?"

Jonathan bit down on his tongue and nodded, "sort of." Her eyes roved over his appearance for a second time; a look of apprehension finally settling there. Jonathan inwardly cringed. *Busted.*

"I'll go get her. Come in!" she beckoned him over the threshold smiling sweetly.

As Mrs Wheeler disappeared up the stairs from the hallway, Mike turned the corner from the adjoining living room and into his line of site. The younger boy sauntered towards the entrance way where

Jonathan remained, feeling slightly unnerved and self-conscious. Mike's face was dressed with the smallest of smirks as he leaned on the doorframe.

"So, you and Nancy?"

"Erm, I guess."

Mike tapped his chin, playing an effortless nonchalance that Jonathan found himself envying. "What happened to Steve?"

He took a sharp intake of breath at the name. At how it sounded horribly accusatory coming from Mike. He had no idea how to answer that.

"It's been a weird few weeks," was all he could manage as he scratched the back of his head. Trying to defend himself to Nancy's younger brother hadn't been part of his plan of coming to see her.

"Huh," scoffed Mike, a knowing grin twisting onto his mouth, "that's your answer? That's your reasoning for boning my sis-"

"MIKE!"

He would swear later that he had never been more pleased to see her. Nancy Wheeler stood at the top of the stairs looking lividly down at her brother. She rushed down them at such a pace it sent Mike scarpering down into the basement, an infantile yelp escaping him.

Drawing level with Jonathan by the front door she stopped. "Hi!" she said breathlessly, sweeping the hair away from her face.

"Hey." Jonathan could see she looked tired, perhaps as though she hadn't been sleeping well either.

"Eugh, you guys are gross. You're such a liar Nancy."

Mike's head protruded from behind the basement door.

"What is it Mike?" asked Nancy, a hand finding her hip. "Why?"

Mike put on a more feminine voice, "oh it's not *like that!*" Jonathan

felt his heart stutter uncomfortably.

"Says you, Mike!" exclaimed Nancy, advancing towards the basement, "what about Eleveh, huh?"

Mike stuck his tongue between his teeth and his bottom lip, a petulant action Jonathan found unnerving.

"You're an ass. Can you just?" she motioned with her hands for him to leave, her eyes wide and threatening. The door was promptly slammed in her face. She gave a growl of annoyance before slapping her hand against the wood.

Then suddenly, Nancy was up close. Hair wild and her brow furrowed in concern. "I'm sorry about that. He's upset Eleven has gone back into hiding. I'm trying to be a bit more tolerant you know? After everything." She crossed her arms over her chest, "Is everything ok with you? I didn't expect to see you til you came back to school."

Her close proximity was thrilling for a brief moment before he realised exactly what she had asked. "Everything's ok, I think. As ok as it can be." He added at her deepening frown. "I erm, my mum said I should come. I mean, I wanted to. But then I didn't know if I should leave Will and-"

"It's not like you could call," interrupted Nancy sheepishly.

He gave a small laugh, "no I couldn't, you're right."

"I'm sorry. I should have borrowed Mike's bike or something," she said, biting her lip, "I should have come to check on you."

He considered this for a moment before responding, "no. It's ok. I wanted to come."

In the hassle of navigating around Nancy's family to his current position in the Wheeler's hallway, he had almost forgotten the cassette in his jacket pocket. It's plastic warmed to his palm.

He took it out and handed it to her.

There was a beat of silence where she gawked at the tape, her eyes

steadying on the black marker label: *1984 – for Nancy.*

Slowly, her mouth tugged to one side as she took it from him. The side of her eyes crinkling beautifully. Nancy trying her damn hardest not to actually beam at him was something he'd had the fortune of observing before.

He was transported back to their hands resting together – the gentlest graze of skin on skin – as she gave him the very same look over the bedside table. Then she had consciously draw away, uncertainty in her averted gaze. This time she allowed the grin to widen, beguiled it would seem by his gesture.

"Is it any good?" she asked, the hint of a smirk apparent on her pretty face.

Jonathan smiled back, a veritable warmth spreading like a deluge in his chest. "That's for you to judge."

She turned the tape over in her hands before she inquired, "no track list?"

He shook his head, "it might just be some of my finest work; I didn't want to give it all away immediately."

The glowing look that accompanied her taking a step closer to him, instilled all his intentions. "Would you like to grab something for dinner with me?"

Nancy raised an inquisitive eyebrow, taking in his smart-shirt before resting on his dilapidated trainers. Her head snapped up to look at him expectantly.

"I was thinking the diner on Silver Street," he tried, scratching at his denim jeans nervously.

Her smile faltered. "I'm not entirely sure if I'm on house arrest." She glanced over her shoulder before whispering, "mom tried calling Stacy, so she knows I wasn't there over the weekend."

As if purposefully summoned, Karen Wheeler materialised at the top of the stairs. Much to Jonathan's displeasure they both instinctively

took a step apart.

"So what's the school project on this time? I didn't realise you shared so many classes," accounted Mrs Wheeler a curious look in her eye as she levelled with the two teenagers in the hallway.

With the tape missing from his pocket, his nails began digging in to the skin, neatly tucking into the groove of his scar. It throbbed painfully, but it helped him keep his face composed. Keep off the no doubt dopey look he had previously worn when looking down at Nancy. Something Mrs Wheeler could no doubt have been privy to had she been stood there long before she spoke.

"Actually," Nancy began, taking a brief peek back at Jonathan as if she couldn't help it, "Jonathan wanted to take me out to dinner. Would I be allowed?"

Mrs Wheeler's expression jumped from curious to astonished in a heartbeat. Jonathan swallowed hard. He hadn't expected Nancy to be so flagrant with her request. So open with the fact that he wanted to take her out. He felt himself shrinking beside Nancy as Mrs Wheeler looked on dumbstruck.

Why wouldn't she? He considered. Nancy had gone from taking pleasure in the company of popular athletic Steve Harrington to quiet loner, Jonathan Byers. He tried to erase the mental image from his mind of the two of them stood side by side in front of Karen Wheeler for her to judge all the positive attributes about Steve that he couldn't possibly hope to possess.

The insecurity must have shown on his face as Nancy took his hand forcibly from his pocket, pressing into the scar before caressing there comfortingly. He relaxed a little, "can I mom?"

"Nancy-,"

"I swear I'll be back by eleven," said Nancy, the faintest hint of desperation noticeable in her tone.

Jonathan, finding his voice from somewhere, recalling the conversation he'd had earlier with his mother added, "actually my

mom wants me home by ten."

Both women looked at him abruptly with a matching blue stare.

"Ten?" queried Nancy. He nodded. "Oh."

Mrs Wheeler, still regarding him with suspicion addressed him specifically, "so you'll drop Nancy off before then?" she looked him up and down again, as if trying to gauge how dangerous it might be for Nancy to go on a date with Jonathan Byers. He held the smallest of sympathies for Karen; she didn't know the half of it.

"Yes, Mrs Wheeler." She cocked her head to one side, the serious expression on her face making her look much more motherly than he had seen before. He squared his shoulders, having allowed them to slump; Nancy's hand in his somehow dispelling his initial defeatist attitude.

"You'll be home by then, Nancy?"

"Yes, mom."

"Make sure you take a jacket."

"Of course, mom."

"Be careful."

"I will," Nancy blurted, fidgeting on the spot. The irony not lost on Jonathan was clearly obviously to Nancy as well.

Karen gave them both a hard look before heading back into the kitchen.

"Your mom seriously has no idea?" Jonathan asked when they were a safe speaking distance from the house.

Nancy drew her coat together across her middle, "I don't know. I think she believed Mike about Will's fever. Which I guess isn't that far removed from the truth."

Jonathan hummed in agreement. Finding an incredulity in Karen

Wheeler's blinding ignorance to what was happening with her children. He was eternally grateful for his own mother in that moment. Her belief of the extraordinary and her eternal support.

"My mom said I should come. She said it would be good for me."

Nancy smiled, leaning into him as they walked. "I'm glad you came."

"I haven't been sleeping well," he confessed, finding the fresh air and freedom of her company loosening his tongue. "Have you?"

"No. I didn't sleep all that well in the last year, though." She sounded disconcerted by her own truth. As they got in the car, she settled into the seat. Just like she always seemed to; making herself comfortable.

"Can we play the new tape?" she asked, that curling of her lips was back again, adorning her face over the sadness. It seemed to wash it away. Whatever she was thinking had erased that pained look of anguish that had darkened her features. He wanted to wash it away forever if he could.

He made a mental note to buy some more blank tapes.

With the cassette in the tape deck they set off to the diner. Upon introspection, Jonathan considered an hour or two away from home could be a good thing. He finally found himself suitably distracted by the presence of the girl beside him. All thoughts of screams, dark veins and sweat left by the roadside in the dust of his exhaust.

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**I await the backlash. I am truly sorry that there isn't more Jancy in this. I really wanted to get down some content of Jonathan finally letting his walls come down a bit though. Hence the text heavy start to this chapter. Either way, there will be more fluff content in the future. I hope y'all aren't too disappointed.**

## 5. Temptation

**Author's note at the end.**

**Disclaimer: Duffer Brothers own.**

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It was the only diner Jonathan had ever been to before. And then it had only been a handful of times. A few of those instances had been with his father. He wouldn't have come here in particular if he didn't already know their burgers were delicious. He'd never been to Benny's or Aunt Vic's the other side of Hawkins, so why chance disappointment now?

Nancy at least didn't protest when they pulled up in the parking lot. The neon *Welcome* sign submerging the car in a heady fuchsia glow. And for a moment he wasn't thinking about food at all, or the look of unvoiced disapproval Karen Wheeler had worn as they'd left.

The music cut out half a second after the engine. It left just him and Nancy; finally, alone. He was overcome by their collective presence, a static energy palpable in the space between them as the last notes reverberated gently into nothingness. A vast expanse seemed to be drawn out between them. His throat was tight with nerves so he remained quiet. Lost in the look of her under the pink hue, her lips darker in the layered light.

She tucked her chin into her chest, almost bashfully. *That* took him by surprise. She glanced up through her darkened lashes towards him, "shall we?"

They were seated at a booth along the window, both removing their jackets and scooting into opposing sides. Their feet bumping together beneath the table. The waitress handed them menus and took out a note pad from her apron. Her gaze lingered for a moment too long on Jonathan.

He noticed. His eyes flicking up quickly to meet hers then averted back down to his menu.

It was too late. Wanda Perkins had recognised him. And by the way her eyes flitted, wide between the two of them restlessly, he anticipated a slew of fabricated ideas were already being conjured as to why the two of them were there together.

Usually he wouldn't care. Wouldn't bat an eyelid. Sat here in her company however, he now had Nancy's reputation on the line as well. The torrid gossip or false truths having already destroyed a part of her high school career.

Nancy, it appeared, had recognised the girl as well. She glanced at him, her face initially impassive seemed to focus on the tension in his shoulders and the frequency his eyes dotted from the table back to her with unease. Her understanding felt like a breath of fresh air to him.

"How are you, Wanda?" a smile lighting her face, her full attention now appearing to be on the girl. A friendly countenance, Jonathan couldn't help taking note of. How easily she did this to best hide her actual intentions.

As Wanda's eyes roved between the pair of them again, Nancy shifted in her seat, her leg sliding tantalisingly between his shins. His knees knocked the underside of the table as he leapt a little off his seat. The sugar pot sprayed a dusting over the tablecloth. Jonathan tried to wipe it into a napkin as Nancy's leg stroked up the inside of his leg, making his head spin. His face felt aflame.

Wanda fixed Nancy with a pointed stare, "fine. You've missed a lot of school recently, Nancy."

At her comment, Nancy's eyebrows rose a fraction in what Jonathan assumed was feigned surprise. He bit back a smile, her leg brushing the denim of his jeans again; tugging the hair on his legs with it. He resisted the urge to cross them, the unusual sensation dizzying.

Nancy however, didn't miss a beat, "there has been some stuff going on with my family. It's sorted now, thankfully."

The girl tilted her head to one side, her expression cold, "uh-huh. Can I get you guys some drinks?"

Nancy nodded at him, a dangerously intense look in her eyes.

"Er-erh, a coke, please." He stuttered feeling foolish for his mental disarray at Nancy's movements beneath the table.

"Same. I think we'll take a look at the menu if that's ok?" asked Nancy, a polite plea for the other girl to leave.

Wanda rolled her eyes, "sure," she cast a look of distaste Jonathan's way before she turned and left. His head had forgotten all about what Wanda might say about them, instead on how his fingers burned with a desire to tug Nancy by her sweater across the table and into his lap.

A breath caught in his throat as her leg travelled further and he found himself staring at her, the sly expression she wore enough to suggest she knew exactly what she was doing.

All the words of gratitude he had for getting rid of Wanda so efficiently were lost as Nancy's leg continued to move languorously between his limbs. He groaned, pressing his legs together, gripping her there. He heard her sharp intake of breath. Satisfied he had control of the situation. That he could control his urge to rip the table from between them so he could devour her there on the diner seating.

This was getting out of hand.

"Maybe we shouldn't have come here," he managed.

Nancy laughed lightly, taking his hand across the table. The more innocent contact causing a pleasant jolt to his abdomen.

"I couldn't give a shit what she thinks." She squeezed his hand, "or anyone else."

She turned her head to make sure Wanda was far enough out of earshot behind the counter. Nancy tugged her leg from between his. He craved the contact back instantly.

Instead she leaned in across the table, he couldn't help but do the same. The secret on her lips visibly threatening to spill out.

He wanted to cut her off. Feel her rose petal lips on his again. That physicality in such a public place was not something he was accustomed to. It felt risky and advertently sexy. His brain was in overdrive.

"Imagine her face if she knew what we'd actually done. What was going on under her nose!"

*What they'd actually done.*

Monsters. Darkness. Fighting. Running. Defending. Comforting. Sex.

His teenage hormones were coursing an ardent fire in his blood. His trousers were tight. He had to slow this down. He tried to recall his initial intentions. What had he wanted?

To get to know her. He had to disengage from the crest of the wave, before he pulled them down hungrily beneath the surface.

"What's your favourite colour?" he blurted out, slightly breathless.

"What?"

"Your favourite colour. I realise we might know each other..." he thinks of the curve of her hips and the porcelain skin of her navel and fidgets in his seat, trying to focus on something more congruous. "... but I don't know any of those sort of... mundane things."

"Favourite colour?" she repeated, her eyes twinkling. She seemed to verge on laughter before she realised he was serious.

He wondered vacantly, if she knew what she was capable of doing to him.

"You've gotta start somewhere," he reasoned, "blue was Will's first word." He smiled a little at the memory.

"Will and me both then," she said returning his smile.

"Blue?"

She nodded settling back in her seat, much like she did in his car,

"you?"

As her eyes darted back down to the menu before her he had a moment free from cornflower blue, regretting asking her, knowing he'd have to answer. And it wouldn't help his situation.

He swallowed a little, the innocence of his question collapsing around him. "Also, blue."

Her eyes locked with his and the blush that bloomed in her cheeks was arresting.

A cola bottle was put down with unnecessary force in front of him. Another in front of Nancy. He recoiled back in his seat slightly, as if being dowsed by ice cold water.

The look Wanda regarded them with wasn't much warmer.

"Do you guys want anything to eat or not?" asked Wanda, her tone beyond uncaring.

"Cheese burger," he said.

"Pancakes."

"Uh-huh," drawled Wanda, threading her pencil behind her ear, "you know I guess what they're saying about you is true Nancy."

Nancy sat up straighter, her gaze now deathly, "what exactly do you mean by that?"

Jonathan found himself wishing immediately Wanda had never come back with their drinks.

Wanda pursed her lips, looking down her nose at Nancy, "was your bed even cold before you invited *Byers* to crawl under your sheets instead?"

Nancy stared hopelessly at the spot where Wanda had been as she sauntered off away from their table. Unable to provide a quipped reply. Shocked into silence.

Jonathan felt uneasy.

He knew all this already. Of course, he did. They'd touched on it in the car to Bauman's. He'd known they'd broken up. She hadn't wanted to discuss it. He hadn't really wanted to address it. They'd had something more pressing to deal with then.

It hadn't been planned. Of course, it hadn't. Yet whatever had been going on between the two of *them* had clearly been scratched raw again away from Hawkins. A freedom they'd both needed. He knew she felt guilty about the timing. Everything felt a little too... close. Maybe even, disrespectful?

"Nancy?"

"I'm sorry, Jonathan." She breathed, her hands covering her face.

The despair she tried to contain, cracking the strength of her outer shell. He felt unsure of how to proceed, except for a familiar feeling of yearning to comfort. He moved round to sit beside her, his arm falling cautiously over her shoulders.

"I'm sorry if I've ruined this," she muttered.

He felt his stomach drop.

"Nance, it's not your fault. We've both been through something unheard of. I don't think coming here helped. Maybe we should have waited."

Her hands fell into her lap, her face scrunching up angrily, "I'm so fed up of people telling me how I should behave. I wasn't happy and I wasn't sure. And then... I was." He stiffened as she looked up at him. Their faces close. Their breaths mingling.

She worried her lip, "maybe we should have waited before hanging out in public."

"Would it have helped do you think?"

"Maybe not," she looked down at her hands in her lap again, her shoulders deflating. "I think people would have been judgemental

whatever happened – not that I care!" she exclaimed taking in Jonathan's hurt look he obviously hadn't managed to hide.

"Eugh, let them say what they like! I'm really glad you came to my house tonight. Honestly." She implored her eyes roving his face seriously.

A moment later their food arrived. Thankfully, brought by a different waitress to Wanda.

Jonathan awkwardly got back in the side of the booth facing Nancy.

He ate his fries quietly, his hunger diminished by the growing disconcerted feeling. That something didn't feel right. Was it wrong that they were doing this so soon? Or was it just strangers clouding his usually level-headed judgement?

Jonathan watched Nancy trace the beads of condensation on her glass and he said it without thinking, "this is weird isn't it?"

"What? *No!* Do you feel weird?"

He wanted to be honest. And honestly, he wished they'd not come out tonight. He wished they'd got take out and eaten it in his car away from prying eyes. It was clearly too early. And whatever was now openly blossoming between them felt terrifyingly fragile.

"I dunno. I feel like I don't deserve to feel this ... happy?" he tried, knowing it wasn't really the words he wanted to say.

Nancy speared a chunk of pancake on her fork, twirling it so the maple syrup stuck to all the edges. "I know what you mean," she sighed, "being in your company just feels so easy and effortless. And now, it's like being my honest self isn't right."

He was startled by how he understood exactly what she meant.

"What more could we do? We're freaking teenagers! We're supposed to be worrying about school work and zits or something! But I'm worrying about if there is anything more I could have done." she gestured with her fork, so much so the pancake almost made it onto his plate.

"You know we did everything we could," he says more confidently than he thinks he believes.

She chewed on the mouthful before slicing another, he took a bite out of his burger. It tasted better than he remembered.

"No one else would understand. The other students at Hawkins High would think it was farfetched! That we'd gone mad if we said anything. I just wanted to get some justice. I needed to do something-"

"I know-" he said, the sound enveloped amongst her quickening words.

Nancy was slicing her pancake with more ferocity the more she spoke, syrup spilling off the edges of the plate, she barely seemed to notice.

"- and then I went and dragged you along with me."

"I came freely, Nance. I wanted to help you," he said in earnest, forcing himself to take another bite of his burger.

Whether she was silenced by the use of her nickname or his comment, he couldn't be sure. He was just grateful that she had halted her assault on her dinner. She worried her lip a darker red, staring transfixed at a spot on his left shoulder.

Jonathan, all thoughts pointing him towards finding a way to curb the deteriorating situation, grasped the first thing that came to mind. Something that he'd first considered stood outside the Wheeler's front door.

"Is a first date supposed to be this hard?"

And then she laughed.

The initial tinkling he'd heard before filled his chest, the noise lightening the dull cloud that was swamping him. It morphed into a full-blown howl so that she was clutching her stomach, her eyes wet. He struggled to hide his alarm at first, the other patrons of the diner it seemed, who were turning in their seats to look at the source of the

commotion were thinking the same. And then it became contagious, the ridiculousness of it all. He found himself chuckling along – their joint laughter like a release. Cathartic amongst the chaos.

"No..." she finally managed, surveying him with a fond look as the laughter subsided. "No, it's not."

"I hope so. I want to be here too," he said, echoing her words.

Nancy curled her fingers around her cola, picking at the label with her forefinger, "I thought about you for such a long time. That's not to completely disregard Steve...agh, I don't know how to explain it, really. Maybe we should talk about something else?" she urged.

"Hopper says it gets easier."

"He's been through a lot too," Nancy reminded him.

Jonathan was left to mull over his own thoughts as someone cleared their table, neither of them having finished their food.

"How was going back to school?" he finally asked. He hoped his continued concern wouldn't feel too overbearing. After all, Nancy Wheeler didn't *need* him to help fight her battles.

She gave a harsh laugh, "I can't stop thinking about the papers and about the other night. I almost failed by chemistry pop-quiz."

Rolling the near empty bottle between her hands, she appeared to be fighting her own internal conflict, Jonathan recognised the crease on her brow from that day sat on his car in the parking lot. There was a struggle going on inside Nancy's head, he wasn't yet privy too. He waited patiently for the inevitable.

A confession. A question. A statement. He was ready. Whatever she was about to throw at him. Her mouth tugged to one side.

"Where is your favourite place to take photographs?"

She asks it shrewdly, almost demanding. As if he'd been withholding the information from her on purpose. He found himself smiling despite himself. Happy to oblige the change of subject.

"I like taking them at home, in the house. The flash bulb overheats after about half a roll of film though. Buildings otherwise. Or open water. I have a great shot somewhere of it hailing into the lake in black and white, I – what?"

Nancy was biting her lip again, the edges of her eyes crinkling. He knew that look. She was holding back that beam again. That smile that he was totally and completely enamoured with. "What?" he asked again, knowing all too well he must be smiling smugly having figured her out.

"You're just so passionate about it. I wish I was as passionate about something like you are photography." Her left hand found her right forearm, clutching herself reassuringly.

He shrugged, "didn't you used to dance?" his gaze found the ballet shoes on the silver chain around her neck. As if drawn there, her hand began toying with it.

"Yes. Of course, if you're attempting a 4.0 GPA it's not for everyone to multitask another extra-curricular. That takes up most evenings on top of that. Sure, I enjoyed it. I wouldn't have called it a passion though."

"When was the last time you danced?"

"You were there."

"Huh?" He tried to recall a time in school where he'd seen her dance. Ballet shoes and a neat bun of brown hair came to mind, but he couldn't really remember anything. His brain was just conjuring visions of Nancy Wheeler. Oh, how he knew he had it bad.

She grinned, "you took photos of my dance class in the town hall. Mrs Barsky had you there for at least an hour; I'm pretty sure we were in eighth grade."

"Oh yeah," he closed his eyes in mock anguish. "She was horribly demanding. I was only taking photos because my mom begged her to let me. Said I needed more social interaction." He added. "I don't think it was the best way to escape being a social pariah."

"I guess. You're doing a great job now," she said cheekily.

"You guess?" he asked scathingly, although unable to help his grin broadening. "You do realise this is my first ever, real date?"

At this admittance, he felt a slight blush coax his cheeks. Jonathan reasoned that he shouldn't really be embarrassed by that. Probably due to the fact that Nancy was watching him avidly. Her mouth now shaped in an "O" and her eyes scrunched at the corners as if she was trying to process the information. She tugged up her sleeve and glanced at her watch. A contemplative groove drew a line on her brow.

"It's 9." She stated, looking up at him through her eyelashes, her mouth now twisting with mischief. "Do you trust me?"

The question was a heavy one. Her eyes were almost seeing through him, an astute calculation happening behind her eyes.

Jonathan thought back to the night in the cabin and her supporting his shoulders as she hid his face from his demon infested brother. He thought of her in his house, vowing to be there for him. And here she was. Outside his family he had never felt trust with such lucidity as he did then. Considering everything they had shared, how hard it was already, and the fact she was still sat there.

Trust was something he had definitely sparred with in the past. He wasn't quite sure when he'd started trusting her so deeply. The fact of the matter was; he did.

"I trust you, Nancy."

With that affirmation, she grabbed his coat and threw it at his chest, he could only look on bewildered as she thrust her own over her shoulders, motioning for him to follow her.

"Thanks!" she waved at Wanda, who gazed at Nancy as though she should be in an asylum rather than the diner she worked in. Nancy impatiently tugged at his arm, his coat dragging behind him as he fumbled to get it on. He took out some bills from his wallet and slapped them on the counter as he nearly tripped out the door in her

wake. They left in a whirlwind, sending the bell above the door chiming merrily.

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She could feel her leg jittering against the other in her seat. She'd played the tape he had made her from the beginning, knowing roughly how long it took to drive to the lake and knowing how long they had to get home. (And how long they had, give or take if ten minutes went awry).

Nancy hadn't told him. She definitely should have. It would have been a great way to pick up conversation with him innocently before they had reconnected properly. Her knowledge of music, her knowledge of new wave music that Jonathan Byers would have gone mad over *had* improved the year they hadn't spoken. Boasting about it on the way back from Bauman's hadn't seemed an appropriate time to voice it but she had gone out of her way to widen her music library.

So when she heard New Order's; Temptation on the cassette Jonathan had given her, it had took all her self-restraint not to straddle him in the driver's seat. It was a song that already made her think of him whenever she heard it.

Jonathan himself was tapping the wheel, twitching every so often to look at her sat beside him. "You want me to drive up to the lake?"

"Yeah."

"Down the track to the water?" Jonathan intoned, a clear uncertain note, audible. She could see the smile he was barely hiding. Knew it was mirrored on her own face. It was a full moon. She couldn't have possibly picked a better night for an impromptu rendezvous to the lake.

Drawing up in Jonathan's beat out Ford at the edge of the lake, she took an encouraging breath. She didn't know where the thought had sprung from. But it had felt so potent and striking, she desired nothing more than to make the thought a reality. Make the night something that wasn't tainted by idle strangers.

Nancy had felt vulnerable under the scrutiny of her classmate Wanda. She assumed that although her and Jonathan hadn't explicitly discussed it that he had felt it too. She had tried to manipulate the conversation with Wanda away from churlish gossip and failed. Paying the price in the process.

She'd felt another resurgence of self-doubt. Jonathan had stayed. He understood. And that's how they found themselves here.

The moonlight was sending a brilliant blue-white light over the ripples of the lake. The trees a guarding halo surrounding them as they both made to get out of the car.

"Where did you take the picture, you were talking about?" she asked, gazing out in wonderment at the glittering scene. She heard the stereo volume hush behind her, the beauty of the setting expanding with it.

He took a few steps towards the water's edge, as he walked off from the jetty the rocks made his pacing more difficult. "I think it might have been the other side. I spent a whole day here, before getting caught in some bad weather."

"Jonathan..." she breathed, just loud enough for him to hear. When he turned to look at her expectantly she motioned for him to join her back on the cement ramp where he'd parked his car. "Can you shut the lights off and still play the stereo?"

He scratched the back of his head looking confused, "the battery wouldn't last very long."

"We don't have very long," she indicated, shaking her sleeve consciously where her watch was out of sight.

He approached her with such polite care she nearly laughed. She leaned on the car as he killed the beams, leaving only the light of the glowing moon.

The first notes of the song started. His head moved sharply to look at her.

"Dance with me, Jonathan?"

He stayed quiet for a moment as the song played on, "I've not actually...erm...danced with anyone before."

She allowed a good-natured chuckle to escape her throat, "I doubt dancing to New Order is like traditional dancing."

Nancy began wiggling her hips blithely, raising her eyebrows.

When he got close enough, she looped her hands round his neck. The last shred of insecurity in his eyes was extinguished as she took another step towards him, bringing their bodies flush together, his hands finally finding her waist.

*Heaven, a gateway, a hope  
Just like a feeling, it's no joke  
And though it hurts me to see you this way  
Betrayed by words, I'd never heard, too hard to say*

All the while their faces inched agonisingly closer. His eyes even darker in the half light.

Whatever they were doing, it still didn't feel normal. Almost dreamlike as the music played on. They'd been thrown into the abyss and were trying to crawl out into the sunlight. Nancy reasoned she could settle in moonlight for the time being.

"Up, down, turn around: Please don't let me hit the ground-" she sang under her breath, their eyes still locked as they swayed together.

"Nancy..." she would never understand how he said her name in such a way it made her toes curl like that. Her whole body awash with anticipation. Full of such promise and honesty and raw, unadulterated longing. As her eyes adjusted to the light, she saw his eyes glistening, of tears threatening to fall.

She smiled at him, his hands gripped her hips harder – more possessively than before. "*tonight I think I'll walk alone: I'll find my soul as I go h-*"

Nancy never finished. His lips were crushing hers as his hand wrapped around her shoulders, melding them as close as was physically possible. Jonathan's confidence appearing to reignite,

fuelled on finding something lost but not forgotten.

It felt scarily like the first time. Each clasping at the other for some sort of purchase on their reality. Their breaths sharp between kisses. The only difference, the soundtrack filling her head amongst it all.

*Each way I turn, I know I'll always try  
To break the circle that's been placed around me.*

She found herself grabbing his arms, so lean beneath layered clothing, it pooled heat in her core. He spun them enough so he pressed her between him and the chassis of the car. She felt it rock as they pushed against it. His fingers coiling around her hair in such a motion she was reminded of the same fingers firm and pulsing. She moaned, nipping at his bottom lip. Tugging at his jacket, she thought about dragging him into the car, onto the back seat. She wanted him so badly. She could feel him hard against her leg which made it all the harder to resist the urge.

Nancy wanted tonight to be more than that. Since he'd turned up at her door even though his brother still wasn't well. Since he'd given her a new mix-tape having not seen her in only a few days. From every single time he looked at her like she was the only creature in existence. Her body was screaming for more, her flesh ablaze beneath his hands as they drew patterns on her back beneath her shirt.

But she wanted something to commit to memory. A moment completely unique to them.

She drew away, resting their foreheads together, and he stole a swift kiss from her parted lips again. She blinked furiously as she looked up at him. His gaze so fervent as it swooped across her face up close. His expressive brow, still creased. And she finds it completely unfathomable just how much she might like him.

"You like the song then?" he asked wryly, his mouth twitching.

All she could do was nod, his mouth finding hers again impatiently. Only this time the kisses were slow and languid. His hands strong, drawing them up straight to find a closer contact if that was at all possible. Their tongues swirled and danced. His palm found her

cheek, a thumb catching the dimple there, holding on.

When they parted again, she was grinning so broadly, a pleasurable knot of desire writhing in the pit of her stomach.

"I think you've got my eyeshadow on your nose," she giggled.

"Ah, I'm sorry," he began, pulling away to wipe his nose with the cuff of his jacket.

"Don't be," she said more brusquely than she intended. She felt hot wrapped in his arms. "We should think about heading back though." His groaned response was enough to question her initially sensible judgement.

"You should come round at the weekend, if you're free."

"Aren't you at school tomorrow; I'll see you then?" she asked.

She could tell, even in the moonlight his face rushed with more colour, "I mean, more, I dunno... to stay?"

Nancy felt the knot tighten.

"Would your mom mind?"

"I'll ask," he said, a near pleading look in his eye.

She smiled coyly at him, placing her hands across his chest, "I look forward to it."

They embraced once more before they got in the car to head back home. Resting her head on his chest, they hugged beneath the moon and stars. The melody crooning away.

Nancy Wheeler couldn't have predicted the last year of events. Neither could she have predicted the person who had helped her through it all. A steadfast entity, Jonathan was the reliable friend she had needed. His unbridled compassion, she had fallen in love with. Even beneath the stars however, it felt too soon to say. Too greedy. They escaped through resilience and bravery. They would have to fight against the bitter sting of continued judgement.

She gripped his shoulders again, taking a shuddering breath of his woody, clean scent as her face buried in his shoulder. He whispered something into her hair that she couldn't hear. She didn't ask him to repeat it.

Whatever this was between them, she knew she would fight every single person or *thing* that questioned it along the way.

*Oh no, I've never met anyone quite like you before.*

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Well Happy Holidays one and all! I cannot quite believe I got this one out before my seasonal celebrations.

It's still not what I had originally intended, but so long as both characterisations shine through to you readers, I'll sleep happily. Also amongst the angst, we finally end on some sweet, candied fluff!

The song *Temptation*, by New Order is my personal favourite to represent Jonathan & Nancy. And so, I feel like this was perfect to end on for a while.

Please read and review and let me know what you think. And to everyone who has already - you guys are totally tubular 3